

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

LEAFLETS
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ARTEMISIA PYCNOCEPHALA
COAST SAGEBRUSH

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

ARTEMISIA PYCNOCEPHALA

COAST SAGEBRUSH

Compositae

Sunflower Family

An erect or spreading woody-based perennial 1 to 2 ft. high, often spreading to over 2 ft. Stems, leaves and external floral parts loosely silky-villous giving the entire plant a soft silver-gray aspect. Leaves crowded, especially at the base of the stems, 1 to 2 in. long, twice or thrice pinnately divided into linear or linear-spatulate divisions. Inflorescence an erect, narrow panicle 2 to 4 in. wide, rising about 1 ft. above the rest of the plant, nodding or drooping at the tip. Flower heads sessile on short, lateral branchlets. Involucres hemispheric, about $3/16$ in. high; involucral bracts 10 to 20, rounded, scarious-margined; outer or marginal flowers fertile, 5 to 20; inner or disk-flowers sterile, 15 to 25, corolla 5-lobed, yellowish. Style undivided or slightly cleft. Achenes small, glabrous, abortive on disk-flowers.

The Coast Sagebrush was first described in 1831 by Lessing, an European botanist, upon specimens from California, but under the generic name of Oligosporus, a name no longer recognized. The specific name pycnocephala is in reference to the dense flower heads. The genus Artemisia, of which this species is a member, includes over 200 species of nearly world-wide distribution. California has about 15 species, including several with numerous variable forms. The best known species of America is the Common Sagebrush (A. tridentata) of the Great Basin and many parts of the interior of California and other Pacific states.

Artemisia pycnocephala has sometimes been treated as a subspecies of A. campestris, a widespread species of not only North America, but also of Europe, Asia and North Africa. We regard it as a distinct species. It is common from Monterey County northward along our California coast and extending to Coos County, Oregon. It is confined to the immediate coast and rarely extends inland more than a very short distance. In most localities it grows on sand dunes, but is also found in loam or even among rocks. Largest wild plants are found south of San Francisco, while to the north they seldom exceed 1 ft. in height. It is an attractive plant wherever found, but is especially beautiful among open stands of Monterey Pines on the Monterey County coast.

Our strain of Artemisia pycnocephala came from seed collected in 1930 along the San Mateo County coast. Many of these plants, grown the following year, are still alive. Surrounding them are many volunteer seedlings. In fact, the species has spread over many parts of the Administration Building grounds.

Propagation and culture of the Coast Sagebrush is simple. Seeds sown in flats in the fall or spring will germinate in about two weeks and after two months will be ready for transplanting to small pots. In another two months they will be large enough to be put in larger pots or set out in the ground (a preferable practice provided a little care can be given them at first). They are not particular as to soil or water and will thrive even in the heaviest adobe soils. Excessive water does them no harm. When once established the stock of plants may be easily increased by division in much the same way that clumps of Chrysanthemums are divided. The plants make well-rounded mounds when planted in full sun; in partial shade they are less compact; while in the shade they become too lax and are not so gray in color. The species will thrive anywhere in the coastal region of California, but is not so successful in the hot interior valleys.

We think that this is the most beautiful gray-leaved perennial of any species native to California and highly recommend it as a substitute for some of the low, gray-leaved border plants now in common use in gardens. Its silver-gray foliage and stems make a pleasing sight when the plants are used adjacent to green shrubs and lawns. It should not be trimmed or clipped but may be kept compact by judicious removal of the flower stalks, which are of no particular beauty once the flowers have opened.

The long flowering stems (just prior to the opening of the flowers) lend themselves to unique and effective use in interior decoration. When used by themselves they are very pleasing and will last for more than a week. If added to bouquets of purple Romero (Trichostema lanatum) or the blues and lavenders of Penstemons such as the Large Blue Penstemon (P. spectabilis) the contrast in colors is exceedingly harmonious.

Seeds of this species are easily obtained from wild plants in the late summer and fall and one plant will yield sufficient to grow a large number of plants. We do not know of any seedsmen who has seeds of this species, but one Los Angeles grower of California Native Plants has potted plants for sale.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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